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**Operational Initiative: What Is It and How  
Do We Get It?**

**A Monograph  
by  
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Armor**



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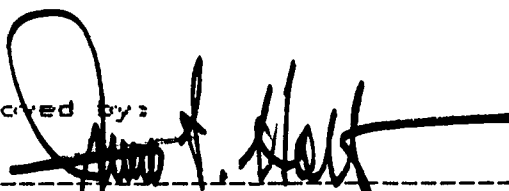
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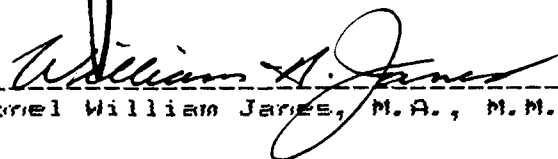
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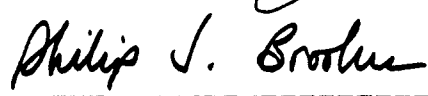
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## ABSTRACT

### **OPERATIONAL INITIATIVE: WHAT IS IT AND HOW DO WE GET IT.**

by Major Randall R. Hill, USA, 45 pages.

This monograph examines how AirLand Battle doctrine defines and utilizes the term initiative, and how initiative can be achieved at the operational level of war. It concludes that, while doctrine defines initiative as "setting the terms of battle by action", the term is frequently used in lieu of, or synonymously, with the terms "attack" or "offensive". This results in doctrinal confusion and an ambiguous doctrinal tenet. To counter this, the author proposes a definition which stresses freedom of action as the manifestation of initiative. The basis for this definition is drawn from the views of several prominent military theorists which are presented in this study.

The second half of this document focuses on means to achieve initiative at the operational level. Through analysis of the campaign which pitted Wellington against Messina in Portugal and the Belorussian Campaign in 1944, four means for achieving operational initiative have been drawn out: accurate situation assessment and determination of the type of campaign to be conducted; deception; logistical superiority; and force generation. When comparing these means with the doctrinal guidance contained in the AirLand Battle imperatives, the latter were found lacking as effective tools. The author's suggestion for correcting these deficiencies is not to lengthen the list of imperatives, but to reemphasize the Principles of War in doctrine, since they adequately address these means for achieving operational initiative.

A final aspect of achieving operational initiative is considered in an analysis of the operational constraints placed upon the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. The author concludes that these constraints led to the operational initiative being abdicated to the North Vietnamese. This resulted in a failure by the U.S. to achieve a favorable conclusion to the war.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Army's AirLand Battle (ALB) doctrine is an aggressive warfighting concept which emphasizes offensive operations and "seizing the initiative." The introductory paragraph to ALB doctrine clearly stresses this:

AirLand Battle doctrine describes the Army's approach to generating and applying combat power at the operational and tactical levels. It is based on securing or retaining the initiative and exercising it aggressively to accomplish the mission. The object of all operations is to impose our will upon the enemy-to achieve our purposes. To do this we must throw the enemy off balance with a powerful blow from an unexpected direction, follow up rapidly to prevent his recovery and continue operations aggressively to achieve the higher commander's goals.[1]

It is the concept of initiative, primarily at the operational level, that this study focuses on. The purpose is to examine how doctrine defines and uses the term initiative, and how initiative can be achieved and maintained at the operational level--an aspect of doctrine I believe is weak.

The intent of this study is not to engage in semantical hair-splitting over how a word is defined and used, but to analyze and improve doctrine. Since initiative is one of the four tenets of ALB, it is important that its definition and usage be clear, concise, and applicable to warfare across the operational continuum. Likewise, it is important that the doctrinal tools, particularly the AirLand Battle imperatives, contribute to the attainment of the tenets, which characterize successful operations according to Army

doctrine. I emphasize the imperatives because according to doctrine they

...prescribe key operating requirements. These provide more specific guidance than the principles of war and the AirLand Battle tenets, and apply to all operations. They are historically valid and fundamentally necessary for success in the modern battlefield.[2]

In the latter half of this study I will be analyzing campaigns to determine what factors seem to contribute to achieving and retaining initiative at the operational level. In doing so, I will compare those factors to the ALB imperatives, to determine if those doctrinal tools measure up and are sufficiently complete to warrant the above quote, or if our doctrine has been weakened by relegating the Principles of War to an annex in the back of FM 100-5, Operations.

But first it is necessary to consider how doctrine currently defines and uses the term initiative. To provide a basis for evaluating the current definition and proposing any needed changes, the concepts on initiative of several noted military theorists will be considered.

FM 100-5, Operations defines initiative as "setting or changing the terms of battle by action,"[3] and in usage it predominantly considers initiative to be either an attribute of, or a result of offensive operations. In some instances, the phrase "seizing the initiative" is used in lieu of the terms attack or offensive, causing confusion as to the



doctrinal definition of the term and reducing communication clarity.

Is this a problem? I believe so. First, the definition "setting the terms of battle by action" is in itself flawed because the doctrine never defines what the terms of battle are, and therefore never really defines what initiative is. Second, I believe the definition is too narrow. I believe a commander or a force can possess initiative, but still not be able to set the terms of battle to the extent desired or necessary to insure success on the battlefield. (Here I consider "setting the terms of battle" to be selecting the time, place, or ideal force ratios for engagements.) I find this particularly the case in low-intensity conflicts where the terrorist, insurgent, or revolutionary can almost always decide when or where to attack or take action. At the operational level, the strategic or political constraints placed upon the commander may not allow him to set the terms that are militarily desirable. By the doctrinal definition then, initiative is not on his side, which may not be true.

Third, if the usage of a term is at variance with the definition, it creates confusion. Consider the situation where a commander states that his intent is to 'seize the initiative', a statement quite common these days. Does he mean that he wants to set the terms of battle as the doctrine defines initiative? Or does he want to conduct an offensive

operation, as doctrine uses the term? Or does he mean that he wants to take advantage of every opportunity to gain the upper-hand? What does he mean, and how can his intent be accomplished? The doctrine links initiative with offensive action (a point to be discussed shortly), but is attacking the only way of achieving initiative?

Finally, if we define initiative predominantly with being on the offensive, we develop doctrine and a manner of thinking that is lopsided. As a result, we forget that war is a continuum consisting of offensive and defensive actions, intertwined and often inseparable, like the oriental yin and yang. Examples of such doctrinal extremism exist to warn us. In To Lose a Battle, Alistair Horne relates the French problems of doctrinal extremism:

In 1870, to state it in the simplest terms, France had lost a war through adopting too defensive a posture and relying too much on permanent fortifications. ... In reaction against this calamitous defeat, France had nearly lost the next war by being too aggressive-minded. Now she was once again seeking safety under concrete and steel. Rapidly the Maginot Line came to be not just a component of strategy, but a way of life. Feeling secure behind it, like the lotus-eating mandarins of Cathay behind their Great Wall, the French Army allowed itself to atrophy, to lapse into desuetude. [4]

Doctrinal extremism has been considered by some historians to have existed in the early stages of the Vietnam War, when the military sought to defeat what was (at that time) largely an insurgent war by conventional offensive operations. [5]

## II. INITIATIVE IN CURRENT DOCTRINE

To begin the analysis of initiative in current doctrine, I will start with a look at the current doctrinal definition, then consider how the term is used in FM 100-5, and finally justify my statement that doctrine links initiative predominantly with the offense. The best way I've found to do this is by analyzing specific passages from FM 100-5, a somewhat tedious but necessary process. Following that will be a survey of theorists' views on the subject which provide the necessary basis for this study.

In FM 100-5, initiative is defined as follows:

Initiative means setting or changing the terms of battle by action. It implies an offensive spirit in the conduct of all operations. Applied to the force as a whole, initiative requires a constant effort to force the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo while retaining our own freedom of action. Applied to individual soldiers and leaders, it requires a willingness and ability to act independently within the framework of the higher commander's intent. In both senses, initiative requires audacity which may involve risk taking and an atmosphere that supports it. [6]

Taken in total, the definition has components which I think are useful, but the emphasis is on the wrong part. It is the gaining and retaining of freedom of action which I perceive constitutes initiative, and which will allow for setting or changing the terms of battle, seizing opportunities to attack, and imposing your will on the enemy. Without freedom of action, two other ALB tenets--agility and synchronization--will be impossible to achieve. It is

critical to bear in mind that freedom of action is not just the ability to move or maneuver forces as desired, but that it includes the constraints and restraints placed upon the commander. This is particularly important at the operational level as we shall see in a later section on the Vietnam War.

Defining initiative as freedom of action is hardly an original thought, as will be shown shortly. Some theorists have expressed the same point of view. But, before venturing into theory, one other point raised in the introduction requires substantiation, and it is with respect to initiative being used synonymously with the offensive in current ALB doctrine. I need to present only four passages to make my point.

I will start with a passage regarding operational defensive operations:

At the operational level, the commander disrupts the enemy attack with spoiling operations, special operations forces, deception, psychological operations, and air interdiction of critical routes, forces, and facilities. The theater commander may also prevent synchronized enemy action by fighting battles which prevent the junction of separated enemy forces or by taking the initiative temporarily to deny the enemy opportunities to prepare deliberate attacks without interference (emphasis added). [7]

Does initiative in this passage really mean "setting the terms of battle" in accordance with the doctrinal definition? Or does it mean that the commander takes offensive action? In the context of this passage, I interpret "taking the initiative temporarily" as meaning

conduct spoiling attacks or interdiction operations. If that is correct, then it would be clearer to write 'conduct spoiling attacks' or whatever is specifically meant instead of "take the initiative". More critical is the question the passage raises: Is it only when an offensive action is taken that a commander (or force) possesses initiative, or are not the other actions listed -- the deception and psychological operations, etc. -- forms of exercising or attempting to gain initiative? All those actions contribute to gaining and maintaining freedom of action, setting the terms of battle, dissipating the enemy's offensive capability, and providing, maybe, the opportunity to assume the offensive.

Further on, the manual discusses the conduct of defensive campaigns and major operations:

Defensive campaigns are fought to defeat a large attacking force, to retain territory, or to gain time for operations in another theater of operation to succeed or for reinforcements to arrive. Strategic considerations, numerical disadvantage, or the enemy's exercise of initiative may all require a theater commander to assume the defense (emphasis added). [8]

Here again, the term initiative is used when the appropriate term seems to be attack. The passage also implies that the commander conducting a defensive campaign that is appropriate to the strategic or operational situation still does not have initiative, even if he is doing precisely what he wants, setting the terms of battle, etc. But by attacking, the enemy is considered to have 'initiative', regardless of whether attacking is either wise or successful.

Another somewhat confusing use of the term:

The defender benefits more from delaying offensive actions until his strength has improved; just as often, however, the defender reaches a point at which he must act or lose the opportunity to take the initiative...[9]

Like other readers, I am admittedly unsure of the exact intent of initiative here--whether it is to attack, not be passive in the defense, or something else. The gist of the passage seems to be that eventually the defender must go on the offensive to gain victory--Clausewitz's concept of the defense being a 'shield of blows'. The point here is that initiative and offense seems to have been used interchangeably producing a muddled result.

A final note on the doctrine's confusing use of the term initiative:

Whatever the design, commanders conducting defensive campaigns mix offensive with defensive tactical actions and contest the initiative in the theater at every opportunity. They should consider their offensive actions carefully, but should accept calculated risks to avoid becoming excessively passive.[10]

While the passage accurately states the need for offensive actions within defensive operations, the phrase "contest the initiative" is unclear. What is to be contested? Is it the terms of battle throughout the theater? The use here does not contribute to the clarity of the passage, or to the overall doctrinal meaning or intent of the term initiative.

Recognizing that the meaning of initiative may now be

confusing to the reader, I will turn to theory in search of clarity.

### III. INITIATIVE IN THEORY

The theoretical basis for AirLand Battle doctrine is found in the works of many military theorists, Clausewitz, Jomini, and Fuller to name a few. It is therefore appropriate to consider how these and other theorists viewed initiative.

#### CLAUSEWITZ AND JOMINI

Clausewitz considered initiative to be a characteristic of the offense because the attacker took the first step, or initiated the action.[11] While most of his concern with initiative was at the strategic level of his time, it is applicable to our current operational level. His view on initiative deals primarily with the potential advantages of surprise attack and the capability to conduct concentric attacks as the initiator of actions.[12] However, Clausewitz' well developed belief in the dominant strength of the defense (all things being equal) would indicate that he did not believe that the attacker's initiative necessarily set the terms of battle, imposed the attacker's will on the defender, or allowed the attacker to maintain freedom of action--all those "initiative" attributes in the FM 100-5 definition. He uses the example of Frederick the Great to prove his point:

In the Seven Years War, for instance, Frederick the Great had no thought in taking the offensive, at least not in its last three years. Indeed, we believe that in this war he always regarded offensives solely as a better means of defense. This attitude was dictated by the general situation...[13]

Thus, Clausewitz clearly did not hold with a prevalent view of his time that a battle initiated by the opponent was already half lost [14], and considered it "beneath our dignity to notice the clamor of those whose vague emotions and still vaguer minds impel them to expect everything from attack and movement, and whose idea of war is summed up by a galloping hussar waving his sword." [15]

Clausewitz' military definition corresponds closely with a dictionary definition of initiative:

1. an introductory act or step; leading action; to take the initiative. 2. readiness and ability in initiating action; enterprise. 3. one's personal, responsible decision; to act on one's own initiative. [16]

Like Clausewitz, Jomini considered initiative to be a characteristic of the offense in terms of taking the leading action. Jomini expressed his opinion as follows:

The offensive presents itself under several aspects; if it be directed against a great State, which it embraces entirely, it is then an invasion; if it be applied only to the attack of a province, or of a line of defense more or less limited, it is no longer an invasion, but an ordinary offensive; finally, if it be but an attack upon any position whatever of the hostile army, and limited to a single operation, it is called the initiative of movements (original emphasis). [17]

Three points are of particular interest in this



passage. The first is that Jomini makes a distinction in terminology between offensives at what we call the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The second is that he relates initiative only to making the first offensive move, not any of the attributes we find in the ALE definition. The final point regards another translation of Jomini's work which translates "the initiative of movements" as "taking the initiative." [18]

While Jomini seems to have placed more emphasis on the offense than Clausewitz did, he too considered the ideal method of waging war to be a combination of the offense and defense.

...the offensive-defensive, may be advantageous in strategy as well as in tactics. In acting thus, you have the advantages of the two systems, for you have that of the initiative, and you are better able to seize the moment when it is suitable to strike... [19]

Definitely, it appears incontestable, that one of the greatest of a general's talents, is to know how to employ by turns these two systems, and especially, to know how to retake the initiative in the midst even of a defensive struggle (emphasis added). [20]

Thus, Jomini appears to have been an influence on the FM 100-5 usage of 'initiative', particularly in the providing the phrase "taking (or seizing) the initiative." But his definition, like Clausewitz', is a narrow one which does not carry the attributes of "initiative" that are in the current doctrinal definition. Both theorists clearly defined what they thought initiative was--another way of saying attack.

## FULLER and HART

Two twentieth-century British theorists whose works appear to have influenced the developers of AirLand Battle doctrine were J.F.C. Fuller and B.H. Liddell Hart. Fuller's concept of initiative has two parts--for an individual and for a force. For the individual, it is the will to act within the context of the plan or the commander's intent, which provides the centralization for initiative. Initiative also entails possessing the ability to recognize when the plan no longer fits the situation and having the flexibility and strength of character to adapt to the new conditions.[21] Much of this part of Fuller's view is present in the current doctrinal definition of initiative.

For the military force, Fuller suggests that initiative depends heavily on the presence and use of reserves, not whether one was necessarily on the offense or defense. Two passages from The Foundations of the Science of War illustrate this well:

Though this may mean that the enemy will push our defensive forces back, it does not necessarily mean that by so doing he has gained the initiative, for the initiative lies in the potential strengths of the reserves, and he who possesses the strongest reserves, as long as they are well placed, is master of this deciding force.[22]

Maintaining the initiative does not necessarily mean attacking and advancing. If the reserves be strong, it may frequently mean defending and retiring in order to create a situation in which their use may lead to decisive victory.[22]

Fuller also felt that maintaining initiative did not rest so

much in the physical destruction of the enemy, but by reducing him to a moral wreck.[24]

Fuller's ideas on individual initiative are reflected in FM 100-5's definition. However, the idea that initiative rests in the strength and placement of reserves and not in the offense is not reflected in ALB doctrine. In the imperatives, the use of reserves garners only passing attention under the explanation of "Conserve strength for decisive action." [25]

I agree with Fuller's view that initiative does not rest solely in the attack or defense, and find that the use of reserves may be a means to achieving initiative. But I do not believe that Fuller really defined what initiative for a military force is.

A close contemporary of Fuller's, Liddell Hart likewise emphasized the moral aspect of disrupting enemy operations. In his book Strategy, Hart lays out his military theories, but never specifically addresses the idea of initiative. But, from his theoretical writings it is possible to draw an idea of what constitutes initiative.

Hart's view of strategy is "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy." [26] That corresponds very closely to FM 100-5's definition of operational art. [27] Hart believed that strategy should reduce fighting to the slenderest possible proportions, and that when fighting does occur, the strategy should have set

the most favorable conditions for the battle. "The perfection of strategy would be, therefore, to produce a decision without any serious fighting." [28] This, Hart felt, could be achieved by maneuvering onto the enemy's rear to cause physical and moral dislocation. By forcing the enemy to suddenly face about he would be physically disrupted and disorganized with his lines of communication threatened or cut. Psychologically, the enemy would feel trapped.

In studying Hart's ideas, it seems to me that the prerequisite to executing such a strategy is freedom of action: First, to execute the distracting maneuvers necessary to cause the enemy to disperse his forces and to deny the enemy freedom of movement; second, to execute the dislocating movement to the enemy's rear.

Hart believed that all the principles of war could be condensed into the concept of "concentration"--concentration of strength against the opponent's weakness. [29] Achieving this required "the dispersion of your opponent's strength, which in turn is produced by a distribution of your own that gives the appearance, and partial effect of dispersion." In Hart's theory, freedom of action to concentrate and move forces would be critical to cause the enemy to disperse his forces creating the weakness to be rapidly exploited before the enemy could recover. Thus, I construe that initiative in Hart's theory would be with the side which possessed the

freedom of action to concentrate forces and maneuver to dislocate the enemy.

#### SUN TZU and MAO

Another theorist who valued the indirect approach and espoused it centuries before Liddell Hart was Sun Tzu. His teachings revealed that a commander must prize freedom of action above all else, and abhor static situations which result in an abdication of the initiative.[30] His writings stress flexibility -- that a commander must adapt to the situation. Defending and retreating were not considered passive concepts if they were appropriate to the situation and yielded greater rewards later.[31] Thus, Sun Tzu took a much broader view of initiative, not limiting it to only the offensive.

Closely following the teachings of Sun Tzu, Mao Tse Tung likewise considered flexibility and freedom of action to be initiative in his conduct of guerrilla warfare. Mao expressed his concept of initiative as follows:

In any war, the opponents contend for the initiative, whether on a battlefield, in a battle area, in a war zone or in the whole war, for the initiative means freedom of action for an army. Any army which, losing the initiative, is forced into a passive position and ceases to have freedom of action, faces the danger of defeat or extermination. (emphasis added)[32]

The effectiveness of this concept was illustrated by North Vietnamese/Vietcong forces in the Vietnam War. When confronted by superior U.S. forces in tactical battles, the enemy would often retreat to sanctuaries in Laos or Cambodia,

preserving their force to strike at another time, and frustrating U.S. attempts to exploit the opportunity. [33] It can be argued that the North Vietnamese/Vietcong often maintained the initiative by not engaging in battle.

I find that initiative as defined by Sun Tzu and Mao to be the most useful I've encountered. It is clear, concise, and recognizes that freedom of action is the prerequisite for all other activities. Further, it is applicable across the operational continuum and applies equally to either offensive or defensive situations. In short, it is adaptable and simple--traits the current doctrinal definition lacks.

#### LIND and DePuy

To conclude this survey of theoretical views, the ideas of two contemporary military commentators are brought forward. The first, Bill Lind, is a frequent critic of current military doctrine and operations, and an advocate of maneuver warfare. He views initiative as being the able to act in accordance with the demands of the situation, with or without orders, or in contradiction to orders if necessary. Mr. Lind considers this to be applicable to individuals and commanders at all levels, and does not define initiative for a military force differently. [34]

Mr. Lind's view is essentially that of J.F.C. Fuller, and is reflected in the doctrinal definition regarding individual initiative. While I agree with Mr. Lind, I find that within the context of ALB doctrine with initiative as a

tenet, it is necessary to define initiative for a military force.

The second writer is General William DePuy, whose ideas and guidance have markedly influenced U.S. Army doctrine for the last two decades. General DePuy views war as the clash of opposing concepts -- those concepts of the opposing commanders. He contends that it is a fact of life that opposing concepts cannot coexist for extended periods. The concept which ultimately prevails must do so by destroying the other one:

This is the process we so blithely label as "seizing the initiative." He who has the initiative must surely have seized it via the imposition of his own concept, and he who loses the initiative has seen his concept rendered useless and irrelevant by the actions of the opposing commander.

"Operating inside the enemy's decision cycle" means neither more nor less than the seizure of initiative via a dominating concept. It could be as simple as a sudden move, say, a counterattack. Or it could be as complex as a counteroffensive. In either case, the progress of a campaign can almost always be gauged by determining where the initiative resides at each moment. The initiative is forever the product of an imposed concept -- however improvised, however simple, however transmitted. [35]

Thus, in this theory, it is the strength of the commander's concept, which is his tool for integrating and applying his assets, which results in initiative. The implication of this is that initiative can be applied or achieved in a number of ways--some offensive and some defensive. It is important to note that General DePuy is not defining initiative, but is stating his view on how

initiative is achieved or what it is a product of.

To summarize the theories presented:

1. Clausewitz and Jomini both viewed initiative in a manner in keeping with the dictionary definition -- that it was taking the leading step or attacking. While this is a clear definition, it is essentially redundant terminology and therefore does not add to doctrine. ALB doctrine reflects some of their views, but not the clarity of usage and definition.

2. Fuller considered initiative as having the flexibility to act in accordance with the situation, and possessing useful reserves. To a limited extent, these views are reflected in current doctrine, particularly in regards to individual initiative. However, his views lack a definition applicable to a military force which ALB doctrine requires.

3. The author's interpretation of Hart is that initiative is having the freedom of action to concentrate and maneuver forces to disrupt and dislocate the enemy physically and psychologically. This agrees with the views of Sun Tzu and Mao who considered initiative to be freedom of action and flexibility. Their's are the most definitive and applicable theories on initiative.

4. Lind's views parallel those of Fuller's on individual initiative. DeFuy's view is applicable toward achieving initiative, but does not provide a concrete definition.



It should be noted that in all these theories, initiative is the same regardless of the level of war being considered. Likewise, I have have found it unnecessary to define initiative differently for the tactical, operational or strategic levels.

As I indicated in the introduction and in my comments on the various theories, I believe that possessing freedom of action is the essence of initiative. I also believe that this view is completely compatible with current doctrine and possesses greater utility and applicability than the current definition. Therefore, I propose the following definition for initiative:

Initiative is possessing freedom of action to execute the commander's intent. For individuals at all levels, it includes possessing the will to act when guidance is lacking or no longer applicable to the situation. Initiative requires an aggressive spirit tempered with commonsense and professional competence.

Possessing freedom of action is a prerequisite for conducting engagements, battles, major operations and campaigns under the most favorable conditions. It allows for setting the terms of battle, exploiting opportunities, and maintaining relentless pressure maintained on the enemy, whether it be in offensive or defensive operations.

I believe the advantages of this definition over the current ALB definition are:

1. A broader theoretical basis.
2. It recognizes the need to limit the constraints and restraints on leaders at all levels.
3. It recognizes the requirement for freedom of action in order to be able to set the terms of battle.
4. It implies that initiative can be an attribute of both offensive and defensive operations.

5. It is more applicable than the previous definition to a low-intensity conflict, where the opponent can generally set the terms of battle (particularly at the tactical level) but does not necessarily have an overall advantage. At the same time, it is fully applicable and useful with regards to mid and high-intensity conflicts.

With this proposed revision of the FM 100-5 concept of initiative, it is time to consider how to achieve (and that includes retaining) initiative at the operational level. To do this, two campaigns and one war will be considered-- Wellington versus Messina in Portugal in 1810, the Soviet's Operation Bagration in 1944 and the Vietnam War.

#### IV. ACHIEVING OPERATIONAL INITIATIVE

##### Wellington v. Messina

In the fall of 1809, after the Austrian defeat at Wagram, Napoleon thought the opportunity existed to drive the British out of Portugal, thus removing the last English presence from the Continent. The British government's position was naturally to try to defend Portugal for as long as possible to retain their foothold on the Continent. The man to whom they intrusted this operational responsibility was Sir Arthur Wellesley, the Viscount Wellington. [36]

Wellington believed the defense of Portugal was possible. Even if defeated by the French, he believed it would be possible to embark his army at Lisbon and sail to the safety of Great Britain. This was important, since preserving Britain's sole army was the only significant operational constraint placed on him [37]. This freedom to

command is the first of the factors which I believe allowed Wellington to achieve initiative and success. The British government did not try to manage the war from London, and Wellington was not pressured to conduct actions which would benefit the politicians at the expense of the military situation.

With protecting his force foremost in his mind, Wellington assessed his situation, the second and most important of the means by which he achieved initiative. By assessment of the situation, I include his determination of the what the campaign objective was to be, how the campaign was to be fought, and what the friendly and enemy capabilities and vulnerabilities were.

I believe there were several key elements in Wellington's assessment of the situation. First and foremost was the need to establish a firmly fortified base at Lisbon from which the army could embark should they be defeated. This would also afford him an excellent support base which would contribute markedly to his logistical superiority.

Second, he recognized that the rugged Portuguese terrain favored the defender. As long as he maintained tactical freedom of movement and gave battle only from strong defensive positions, he would have the advantage.

Third, he recognized that the French would be forced to operate on extended lines of communication through difficult terrain, and that the French army subsisted to a great degree

on foraging. Harassment and interdiction of the French lines of communication coupled with removal of local forage would severely weaken the French offensive capabilities.[38]

On the other side, Wellington's forces were well-supplied, their lines of communication much shorter and essentially invulnerable to French attack. The British controlled the seas and supplies from Britain were more than adequate.[39] This logistical superiority contributed to Wellington's operational initiative by largely eliminating the concern for logistics and providing him time to allow the French to exhaust themselves.

These factors led Wellington to elect to conduct a defensive campaign of exhaustion, integrating guerrilla operations against the French lines of communication with strong delay and defensive tactics based on the advantages of the terrain. The French plan was to conduct an offensive campaign with the objective being the seizure of Lisbon, the Portuguese capital and Wellington's support base.[40]

The campaign began with Wellington possessing a force of roughly 35,000 British soldiers including cavalry and artillery, plus 20,000 Portuguese regulars that were trained, equipped and largely led by the British. This well-integrated joint force was enhanced by an additional 30,000 Ordenancia, a home guard force mobilized by the Portuguese government that would prove very effective in harassing the French movements and logistical supply. The strength of the

Anglo-Portuguese alliance and the excellent integration of the military forces would contribute greatly to Wellington's achievement of operational initiative and ultimate success. Surprisingly, Napoleon ignored the existence and capabilities of the Portuguese forces throughout the campaign, causing him to consistently underestimate Wellington's capabilities.[41]

Opposing Wellington would be a French army of about 65,000, led by the aging Marshal Massena. Reluctant to take the command, Massena would be plagued throughout the campaign by discord with his three corps commanders (Ney, Junot and Reynier), and inadequate logistical support.[42]

Wellington's first activities were directed towards fortifying his base and harbor at Lisbon, as well as the two approaches to the capital through Torres Vedras and Mafra. This was an effort that would take months to complete, thus requiring him to defend and delay against the French for as long as possible starting at the Portuguese-Spanish border.

The French invasion began in June of 1810. Suitable invasion routes through the intensely rugged terrain were few. Wellington accurately predicted the routes the French would take and conducted an effective series of delaying actions from forts and well-prepared defensive positions. He maintained tactical freedom of action, giving battle only where it suited him and the terrain was clearly in his favor. His forces fought well and inflicted far greater casualties than they sustained. The French attempts to out maneuver

Wellington were clumsy and consistently blocked by the more agile British-Portuguese forces.[43]

While Wellington's regulars delayed against the numerically superior French, the Portuguese partisans constantly harassed the French supply efforts. Further compounding the French problems would be the scorched earth policy that the British and Portuguese efficiently carried out, depriving Messina's army of the local forage which they counted on to sustain themselves.

In spite of the difficulties, the French pressed on, continually maintaining what appeared to be an offensive. However, the deeper Messina pushed, the more he lost freedom of action and therefore the initiative. French casualties increased while supplies decreased; unrest among the troops grew as did discord among the most senior commanders.[44]

Wellington's delaying action lasted nearly five months, providing sufficient time for the completion of the defensive works at Torres Vedras outside Lisbon. These the British occupied on October 10, 1810. Four days later Messina arrived in front of these positions and was stunned by their impregnability and the tortuous, rain-flooded terrain that lay between him and Lisbon. He recognized that his only option was to sit and wait, hoping that Wellington would leave his positions and come out to fight.[45] The initiative now lay totally with the defender, Wellington.

Wellington recognized both the impregnability of his positions and the weakness of his starving opponent whose supply lines were cut. Wellington summed up the situation: "I could lick those fellows any day, but it would cost me 10,000 men, and, as this is the last army England has, we must take care of it." [46]

From October till March there was virtually no fighting as both sides sat in strong defensive positions. Though it would appear to be a stalemate, Wellington was actually winning. He possessed the initiative and was setting the terms of battle. French forces dwindled to about 45,000 while British reinforcements raised Wellington's strength to over 60,000.

Finally on March 1st, Messina was forced to begin to retreat back to Spain. Constantly harassed, the French army was lucky to escape across the border a month later. At the end of April 1811, Messina made one more short, unsuccessful invasion attempt before ending the French campaign to defeat the British in Portugal. [47]

In analyzing this campaign I have emphasized the four points which I believe contributed most to Wellington's achievement of initiative. In order of importance they are: his assessment of the situation; his logistical superiority; the strength and unity of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance; and his freedom to command.

Are these four points emphasized in our doctrine? Not to a satisfactory degree in my opinion, and here is why. Consider the ALB imperatives, remembering that they "prescribe key operating requirements" and "...provide more specific guidance than the principles of war." [48] In those ten imperatives there is little that guides a campaign planner to make a detailed assessment of the situation to determine the type of campaign to be conducted. There is no mention of determining the campaign objective or emphasis on achieving logistical superiority. These are extremely important in any military operation, and their absence from the list of imperatives is a significant doctrinal deficiency. However, I don't think the best solution to this problem is to lengthen the list of imperatives. My suggestion is to take the Principles of War (which have proven to be useful guides for decades) out of an annex in the back of the manual and integrate them more fully into current doctrine. In this instance, the principle of Objective provides far better guidance and focus than the ALB imperatives.

On the positive side, joint/combined operations are emphasized satisfactorily both in the imperatives and throughout the entire doctrine, and the idea of freedom to command is considered and implied in the tenet of initiative. Thus, this brief analysis of the British side reveals both strengths and weaknesses in our current doctrine. It also



reveals two potential imperatives (should future doctrinal writers elect not to re-emphasize the Principles of War) that would substantially strengthen ALB doctrine: first, assess the situation to determine the nature of the campaign to be fought, and continually check both friendly and enemy capabilities to insure the right campaign is being fought; second, strive for logistical superiority to assist in achieving and maintaining operational initiative.

The French side of the campaign provides valuable lessons as well. First, the French sought to gain the initiative by attacking the British forces, just as current ALB doctrine would suggest. However, in doing so they made several mistakes that prevented them from obtaining initiative and success. First, Napoleon failed to recognize the strength of the alliance. He consistently underestimated the enemy's capabilities, ignoring the valuable contributions the Portuguese made to their country's defense. Second, the French overestimated their logistical capability and apparently never anticipated the possibility of a scorched earth tactic. Finally, they lacked unity of effort. Messina's own command lacked unity, and support from French forces in Spain was lacking. Basically, Napoleon and Messina failed to accurately assess the situation, achieve logistical superiority and maintain unity of effort--those same points that Wellington used to gain the initiative and success.

## The Belorussian Campaign

In the summer of 1944, the Russians undertook offensive operations that destroyed the German Army Group Center, located in a salient in Belorussia. Preceding the offensive, two factors were of primary importance to the Red Army achieving operational initiative and ultimately success--deception and force generation. These two aspects will be the focus of this campaign analysis. While the execution of the deception plan and force generation effort were intertwined and essentially inseparable, for the sake of analysis and understanding I will separate the two. While relating the significant details of the Soviet operation in these two areas, I will also consider whether current U.S. doctrine would guide planners to do similar things to achieve operational initiative and success.

Within the Soviet deception plan, two aspects were critical to its success at the operational level. The first was the campaign option selected and its linkage to other campaigns. The second was the speed and secrecy of planning.

Stalin and his General staff considered three campaign options: the first was a massive thrust from the Ukraine through L'vov, then north to the Baltic Sea at Koenigsburg; the second was an offensive from the Ukraine into the Balkan countries; and the third was an offensive to destroy Army Group Center in the Belorussian salient (map p.40). [43]

Stalin rejected the first two options as being beyond

the operational capabilities of the Red Army. The offense against Army Group Center was selected for several reasons: first, it threatened and inhibited Red Army operations in the Ukraine and Balkans; second, it still was a potential threat to Moscow; and finally, destruction of the army group was an obtainable objective. [50]

On the opposite side, German intelligence recognized two of the three options considered by Stalin--the thrust to the Baltic and the offense into the Balkans. Hitler and his staff believed, like Stalin, that the thrust to the Baltic Sea was beyond the Soviet's capability. An offensive against Army Group Center was not considered likely due to the terrain, the success the Germans had experienced there, and because all five of the Soviet tank armies and the preponderance of the Red air armies were in the Ukraine.

That left the Balkan option, which was believed would be the option taken since it would strike at Germany's weak allies and at the primary source of Germany's strategic supplies. Additionally, having endured a series of defeats in the Ukraine, Hitler and his staff were convinced that Stalin would seek a decisive blow originating in the Ukraine, which also was the point where the Germans were strongest. This perception would be held by Hitler and the OKW until 24 June 1944, two days after the Red Army offensive began. The Russian deception plan focused on reinforcing Hitler's belief. [51]

This aspect of deception, reinforcing the opposing commander's beliefs, is recognized in U.S. doctrine as being the best basis for a deception plan.[52] But in FM 100-5, the importance of deception--particularly as a means of achieving freedom of action and force protection--is given relatively little notice.[53] In the ALB imperatives, it is included as part of "Use terrain, weather, deception, and OPSEC." It is my opinion that deception, particularly at the operational level, can pay dividends which far exceed the amount of resources required, and it must become a more important aspect of doctrine and training. Once again, I find that the imperatives do not provide the emphasis that exist in the Principles of War, in this instance in the principles of Surprise and Security.

As noted earlier, critical to the Soviet deception plan was how Operation Bagration was linked to other campaigns, causing the distraction and dispersion of German forces (an excellent example of Liddell Hart's theory). The April Crimean offensive reinforced the German perception that the Soviet effort would continue to be primarily in the south. The June Finnish offensive was timed to divert German attention and resources from Belorussia.[54] The Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6th prevented reinforcement of Army Group Center and drew away desperately needed Luftwaffe assets.

The ability to link campaigns together in this fashion

is an aspect of U.S. doctrine that is still in developmental stages. Doctrine does recognize the need to link campaigns together to achieve strategic aims, but there is little definitive guidance on how to do so. [55] To be able to integrate campaigns to achieve or reinforce a deception effort is not a well-developed doctrinal concept. This may be a facet of operational art that cannot be adequately developed in doctrine, but is acquired by commanders through historical study and experience.

The second critical facet to the Soviet operational deception was the speed and secrecy of planning. To insure secrecy, only Stalin and five others were involved in the planning: Marshall G.K. Zhukov and Marshall A.M. Vasilevskii, who would each control two Fronts; General A.I. Antonov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff; General S.M. Shtemenko, Chief of Operations, General Staff; and Shtemenko's deputy. [56]

Planning began in mid-April and by May 25 the Front commanders had been briefed and some units had begun repositioning, although the deception efforts conducted by two fronts in the southern Ukraine had begun in early May. A tentative start for the offensive of 15-20 June was set. The full offensive actually began on June 22nd, the third anniversary of the German invasion of Russia. It is significant to note that the total planning time for this major offensive was roughly nine weeks, and that during the

planning period, virtually all orders and plans were given verbally. The Fronts did not receive permission to disseminate written plans until two days before the offensive began. [57]

Does our U.S. doctrine stress speed of planning and security sufficiently? I believe so. The tenet of agility and emphasis on acting faster than the enemy can respond are well-established throughout our doctrine. It is a matter of training to make it possible. The aspect of security in planning is also doctrinally developed, and the recently executed Operation Just Cause in Panama indicates that the capability for secure planning exists within the U.S. Army.

The significance of the deception plan and its importance in protecting the preparation effort becomes more apparent when the force generation and logistical requirements are considered. The plans required redeploying five combined arms armies, two tank armies, two mechanized corps, two cavalry corps, and eleven aviation corps; creating an additional tank army; generating and deploying 210,000 replacements; and stocking over three million tons of supplies. Approximately 5,000 trains would be moved in roughly five weeks in support of the offensive preparations. [58]

The ability to generate 210,000 new soldiers and create a new tank army in a period of about three months after over four years of devastating war was a major accomplishment.

That the Soviets were able to do so without the Germans realizing it, added to the impact of their deception effort and their overwhelming power. Adding to this was the overall Russian logistical superiority, aided by Allied efforts, which enabled them to conduct a massive buildup and the offensive. Operational movement of forces from the Crimea and Ukraine completed both the force generation and deception efforts.

Within U.S. doctrine, the concept of force generation is most clearly carried in the principles of mass, maneuver and economy of force. Within the ALB imperatives, the idea is slightly conveyed in the imperatives of conserving strength for decisive action and of using combined arms and sister services to complement and reinforce. In the doctrine as a whole, the concept of operational level force generation through mobilization, operational movement/maneuver and force positioning garners limited attention. For the tactical level, FM 100-5 does a good job in this area. For the operational level, it needs improvement.

For the Soviets, the close coordination and effectiveness of deception and force generation protected the preparations for the offense. More importantly, it provided the element of surprise, both in the location and the strength of the attack. The total result was the Red Army having the operational initiative, the value of which can be seen in the success of the operation. In three days the Red

Army achieved its initial objectives; by July 4th, Army Group Center was encircled; two weeks after the offensive began Army Group Center ceased to exist. The Germans had lost 28 divisions and 300,000 men--and the Red Army continued to roll west. [59]

### The Vietnam War

The United States' involvement in Vietnam spanned a period of roughly twenty years, with the intensity and magnitude of commitment varying throughout that period. The complexity and controversy over the U.S. involvement in the war is much too extensive to be discussed in detail here, but it is possible to draw some deductions from the war that are relevant to this study. The intent of using the Vietnam War is to illustrate how constraints placed on the operational commander can limit his options to the point where operational initiative is abdicated to the opponent.

For military historians and analysts, much of the conflict's controversy stems from the manner in which the military commanders fought the war. Opinions fall essentially into two camps, and indicate how difficult it can be to make an accurate assessment of the type of campaign or war to fight. There are those who believe that the war was predominantly an insurgency, and that the military failed to devote sufficient attention and resources to the counterinsurgency fight. Representative of this group is the opinion of Dr. Andrew Krepinevich, author of The Army and



Vietnam, who contends that the Army applied its ingrained "Concept" of focusing on mid-intensity, conventional wars relying on massive firepower to minimize casualties.[60] He believes this concept was out of place in Vietnam and was applied at the expense of counterinsurgency operations. In short, this was a primary cause for military and political failure to achieve a favorable outcome.

The opposing camp views the conventional aspects of the Vietnam War as being most important, and that the counterinsurgency efforts only served to divert attention and resources from the real problem. Those taking this position usually cite the absence of significant Vietcong activity after the TET offensive, and the dominance of conventional operations in the latter stages of the war, culminating with tanks rolling through Saigon in 1975. The book On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context by Col. Harry Summers is representative of this viewpoint.

What hindsight shows with relative clarity is that both sides are right depending upon where and when you are looking. Regarding the war in its entirety, neither side is completely right or wrong. The North Vietnamese cleverly waged a war combining both insurgency and conventional tactics, varying the emphasis to suit the situation.

The point to be made is the criticality, and the difficulty, of accurately determining the situation and the appropriate response. As Clausewitz points out,

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. [61]

If the military and political commanders failed to accurately recognize the nature of the conflict, this error was compounded by the political constraints placed upon the operational level commander. The impact is clearly revealed in a question and answer session in March 1968 between the newly installed Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Earle Wheeler:

Q: (Clifford) What is the plan for victory?

A: (Wheeler) There is no plan.

Q: Why not?

A: Because American forces operate under three restrictions: The President has forbidden them to invade the North, lest China intervene; he has forbidden the mining of Haiphong Harbor, lest a Soviet supply ship be sunk; he has also forbidden pursuing the enemy into Laos and Cambodia because that would widen the war, geographically and politically. [62]

The political and military decisions were made to wage the war using U.S. forces in predominantly conventional roles and operations to capitalize on U.S. logistical superiority and force generation capability, which could result in achieving the initiative. However, the political restrictions under which the U.S. operated abdicated the operational initiative to the North Vietnamese.

The North Vietnamese did not confine their war to North and South Vietnam. Laos, Cambodia, and to a limited extent, Thailand were included in their theaters of operation.

Additionally, external support was funneled through China and brought by sea from the Soviet Union. On the U.S. side, the operational constraints limited the war to the South Vietnam theater of operation. By default, the strategy for the war became one of exhaustion. The military was unable to isolate the North Vietnamese from their sanctuaries or their sources of supply. More significantly, the restrictions prevented the attack of North Vietnam with sufficient strength or in a manner which would break the will of the North Vietnamese leadership to prosecute the war in the south before American national will collapsed. The operational initiative was abdicated by the American political constraints, negating the U.S. conventional military and logistical power.

The political constraints placed on the military are important. It is not my belief that the military should operate unfettered by political considerations, nor is it my intent to argue whether President Johnson's fears of expanding the war were correct or not. My intent is to show that the constraints must be carefully calculated, and not be so restrictive as to deny the military commander the freedom of action necessary for success.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the concept of initiative in terms of doctrinal definition, usage and how initiative at the operational level can be achieved. The current definition is flawed by being too narrow, with too great an

emphasis on initiative being achieved by offensive actions. Confusion is added regarding the meaning of the term when doctrinal literature uses the term initiative in lieu of, or synonymously, with the terms "attack" and "offense".

While initiative may definitely be achieved and maintained by offensive action, it can be attained while in a defensive posture as well. The significance of this issue is to avoid doctrinal extremism, or overemphasizing the offense to the extent of forgetting that war is a continuum of offensive and defensive actions. Such doctrinal lopsidedness is already appearing within the U.S. Army. As an example, a concept for future AirLand Battle doctrine states that all tactical actions will be offensive. [63]

How initiative has been achieved at the operational level has been examined in two campaigns. From these, four means for achieving initiative at the operational level have been drawn out: accurate situation assessment and determination of the nature of war or campaign to be conducted; deception; logistical superiority; and force generation. A brief look at the Vietnam War revealed how political constraints, coupled with poor or conflicting assessments of the situation could prevent the operational commander from ever possessing initiative, in spite of logistical and conventional force generation superiority.

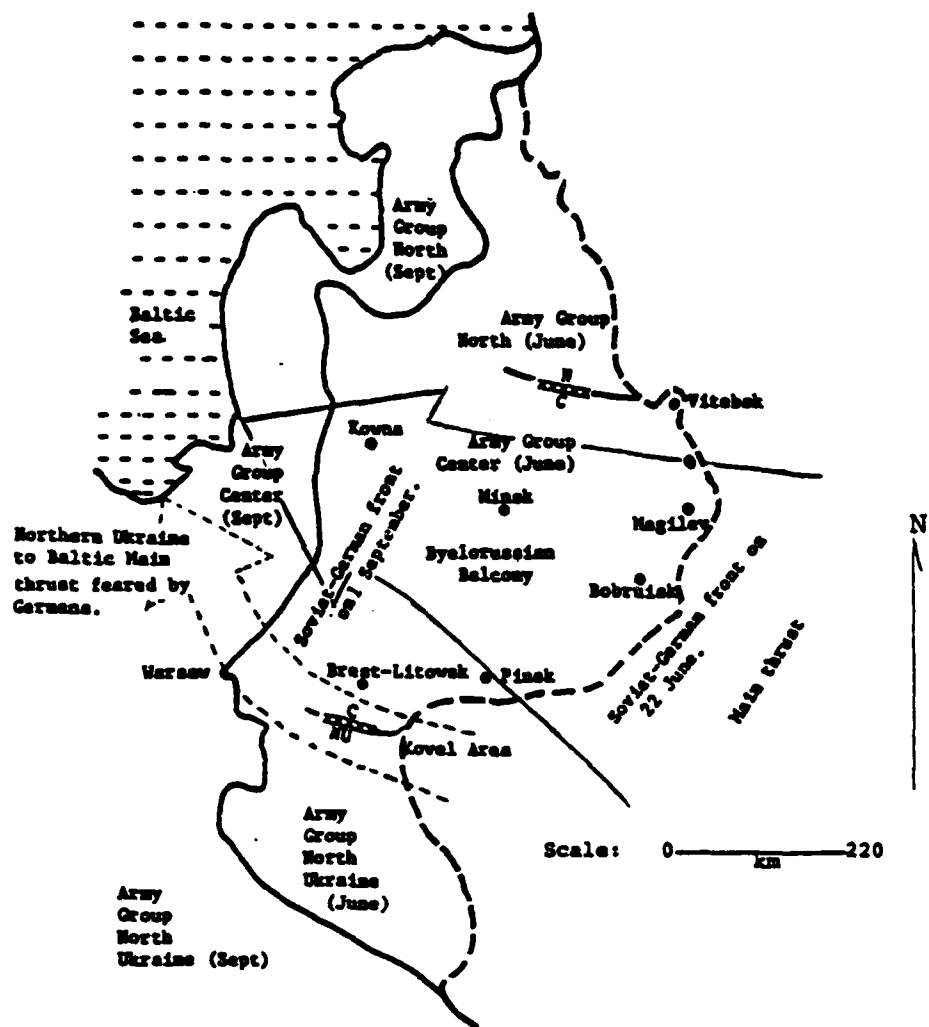
The intent of drawing these means to achieving initiative out of the campaign studies was also to determine

if the ALB imperatives were sufficient doctrinal tools for achieving operational initiative. The need for situation assessment is recognized within the doctrine as a whole, and exists best in the principle of objective, but is absent from the list of imperatives. A comprehensive approach of analyzing the situation in terms of ends, means and ways for both sides of a conflict is lacking.

The values of deception and logistical superiority are noted within the imperatives and doctrine as a whole, but they are not recognized as methods for achieving initiative, nor are they given emphasis commensurate with the advantages that they can bring, particularly at the operational level. I believe that greater emphasis on the Principles of War throughout doctrine would be the best solution to this problem, rather than lengthening the list of imperatives.

The final "means" to operational initiative--the concept of force generation at the operational level is largely what operational doctrine should be about. How the U.S. Army can accomplish force generation through mobilization, force regeneration, operational movement/maneuver and force positioning is not yet well developed in ALB doctrine, and would be useful subjects for future studies. As this study was not designed to be the definitive solution on how to achieve operational initiative, studying other methods for obtaining that elusive quality would be fruitful material for future doctrinal studies.

Russian Summer Offensive, 22 June - 1 Sept 1944



From Center for Army Lessons Learned Bulletin No. 3-83, p. 6.

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